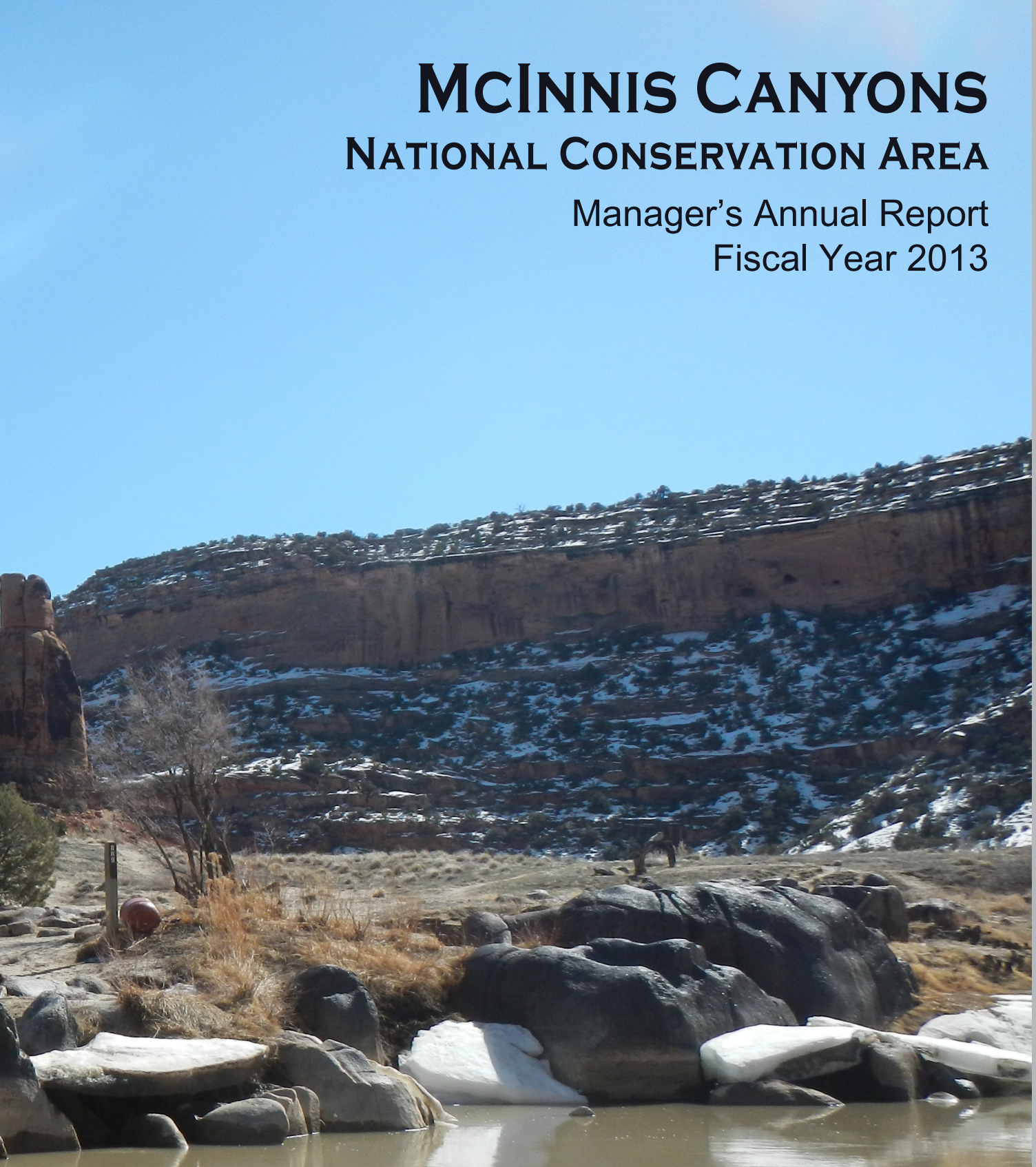
McInnis Canyons
National Conservation Area

Manager's Annual Report
Fiscal Year 2013



NATIONAL CONSERVATION LANDS

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McInnis Canyons

National Conservation Area

Manager's Annual Report

Fiscal Year 2013

October 1, 2012 — September 30, 2013

Bureau of Land Management

Grand Junction Field Office

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1 McInnis Canyons Profile

Unit: McInnis Canyons National Conservation Area and Black Ridge Canyons Wilderness.

Designating authority: Colorado Canyons National Conservation Area and Black Ridge Canyons Wilderness Act of 2000 (Public Law 106-353), October 24, 2000; renamed through Public Law 108-400, October 30, 2004.

Acreage: 123,430 acres, including the 75,550-acre Black Ridge Canyons Wilderness.

Elevation: 4,324—7,135 feet (1,318—2,157 meters)

Estimated number of visitors in FY 2013: 295,491

Fiscal year 2013 budget: $590,744

Field office: Grand Junction Field Office, Northwest Colorado District.

Contact information:

Collin Ewing, NCA Manager

McInnis Canyons National Conservation Area

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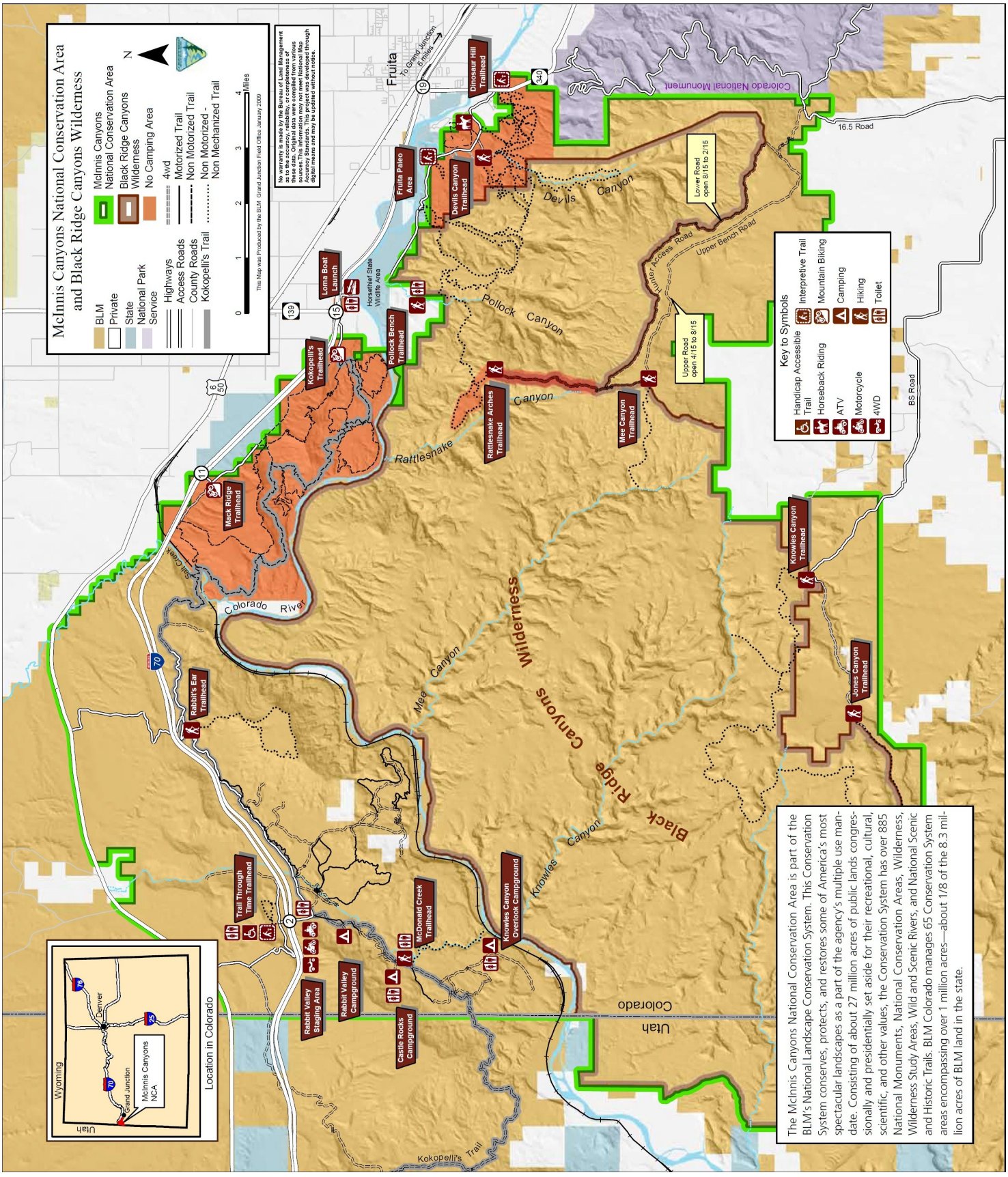


Figure 1. Map of McInnis Canyons National Conservation Area

Staffing

The permanent staff of the McInnis Canyons NCA (MCNCA) consists of an NCA manager (currently shared with Dominguez-Escalante NCA), a science ecologist (a joint position that also supports Gunnison Gorge and Dominguez-Escalante NCAs), a park ranger, a law enforcement officer (shared with Dominguez-Escalante NCA), a river ranger and an outdoor recreation planner. In FY 2013, the seasonal staff included one river ranger and one administrative assistant (shared with the Grand Junction Field Office) to administer river permits.

The NCA receives special recreation permit administration, facilities maintenance and other program support from staff members in the Grand Junction Field Office, primarily in the areas of visitor services and contact, geology and paleontology, cultural resources, range management, wildlife biology, ecology, weed management, geographic information systems (GIS), and soil, water and air quality.

2 Manager's Corner

Collin Ewing was appointed Manager of the McInnis Canyons NCA in April 2013. Collin is a native of northern Colorado and a graduate of Colorado State University. He has a background in rangeland ecology.

As a child growing up in Loveland, Colorado, I always dreamed of a career in natural resources. Like many people in the United States, I was familiar with the National Park Service, U.S. Forest Service, and even my state wildlife agency (then called the Colorado Division of Wildlife) but had only heard of the Bureau of Land Management in passing. As a student at Colorado State University, I became more familiar with the mission of the BLM, but the BLM's system of National Conservation Lands and its individual units, the national conservation areas, were not on my radar at all.

When I left the Forest Service in western New Mexico for a position with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in Grand Junction, I began working closely with the BLM on endangered species issues. It was through conversations with the local BLM employees in Grand Junction and Montrose and with my new hiking, boating, and fishing buddies in western Colorado that I was finally exposed to these national treasures right here in our own backyard.

I think members of the local community have done a superb job of finding a way to share their enjoyment of these treasured landscapes with their friends and families throughout the Nation. As the NCAs have slowly gained recognition, the BLM has found partners that are willing to invest time, money, and sweat into preserving the valuable resources and purposes for which the NCAs were designated.

In 2013, groups like the Colorado Canyons Association, the Tamarisk Coalition, the River Management Society, Colorado Mesa University, Colorado Youth Corps Association, Mesa County, Grand County, Western Association to Enjoy Rivers, the Conservation Lands Foundation, the Colorado Plateau Mountain Bike Trail Association, the Museum of Western Colorado, our livestock grazing and special recreation permittees, and many individual volunteers all came out to provide much needed labor, time, education, interpretation, and coordination in order to improve the resources and foster appreciation of McInnis Canyons NCA. We are so fortunate to have such dedicated partners to help us build community stewardship of this special place.

3 Year's Projects and Accomplishments

Major accomplishments

New NCA manager appointed

The BLM appointed Collin Ewing as manager for McInnis Canyons NCA. Ewing was also appointed as interim manager for the Dominguez-Escalante NCA. Both positions were previously held by Katie Stevens, who was promoted to field manager of the BLM's Grand Junction Field Office.

Campground and Colorado River campsite reservation system expanded

Several campsites were added to the Rabbit Valley campground, and the permit reservation system for the sites along the Ruby-Horsethief stretch of the Colorado River was expanded to issue permits for every day of the week during the high-use season. The BLM collected $64,943 in campsite permit fees. Of these fees, $6,113 went to operations, $34,134 went to labor, and $26,696 was carried over.

Current areas of focus

Waterfront rehabilitation

The major areas of focus for the MC NCA in FY 2013 were improving and managing the river camping permit system (see "Major Accomplishments" above) and operating the NCA's highly successful volunteer and partnership programs to remove invasive plants and trash from along the riverfront and restore native cottonwood trees. These are ongoing, long-term programs that will continue well beyond the next fiscal year.

Education, outreach, and interpretation

Colorado Canyons Association annual scavenger hunt

In May 2013, the Colorado Canyons Association (CCA) hosted the fourth annual nature scavenger hunt in McInnis Canyons NCA. This event was attended by 250 third graders from three local area schools, who visited several stations where BLM employees or CCA volunteers interpreted the cultural and natural resources of the NCA.

Other events

See “Partnerships” below.

Partnerships

Conservation and youth corps

This was the fourth year that three conservation and youth corps underwent training along with the BLM on the Colorado River. Partnering with the BLM allowed corps work crews to get hands-on experience with tamarisk control, herbicide application, river safety, and padding.

Interagency workshop

In March 2013, the BLM, in partnership with Colorado Mesa University's Water Center, the Tamarisk Coalition, the River Management Society, and the Submerged Lands Management Conference co-hosted a biennial interagency river management workshop at Colorado Mesa University in Grand Junction. The workshop was called “River Crossings: Linking River Communities” and showcased several river restoration projects underway along the Colorado, Dolores, and Escalante rivers, including the work done restoring native cottonwoods on the Ruby-Horsethief stretch of the Colorado River in McInnis Canyons NCA. Several presentations were given by BLM specialists, and they can be viewed through the River Management Society’s website: http://www.river-management.org/river-management-workshop.

Upper Colorado River interagency fire crew

In April, the NCA’s river rangers partnered with the Upper Colorado River interagency fire crew to burn 42 piles of cut and treated tamarisk from 2.5 acres that were cleared of tamarisk in 2012.

Western Colorado Conservation Corps

In May, under a seven-year-old partnership with the Western Colorado Conservation Corps, the BLM cut and treated tamarisk on .7 acres.

Russian knapweed

In July, the river staff, along with the BLM weed crew, treated 19.9 acres of Russian knapweed at various locations along the river in the MCNCA.

Interagency weed control milestone

In August, the BLM and its partners Mesa County Weed and Pest District and Grand County, Utah, celebrated 13 years of controlling purple loosestrife on the Colorado River, including in the NCA.

Other partnerships

See "Education, outreach, and interpretation" on page 6 and "Science" on page 18.

Volunteers

Colorado River trash removal

In August 2013, the BLM partnered with Western Association to Enjoy Rivers for the ninth annual Colorado River clean up. Over 70 volunteers participated, collecting more than 22 cubic yards of trash, including 24 tires, two televisions, two grocery carts, and one hot tub.

Trail maintenance

In FY 2013, volunteers from the Colorado Plateau Mountain Bike Trail Association (COPMOBA) continued their valuable work maintaining trails, providing environmental education, and sponsoring trail rides that showcase the resources of the NCA.

Recreation program volunteer hours

Volunteers participating in events sponsored by the BLM's recreation program and its partners logged a total of 2005 volunteer hours in FY 2013.

Mygatt-Moore Quarry

Volunteers from the Museum of Western Colorado and Dinosaur Journey Museum were an indispensable part of the work crews and educational events at the Mygatt-Moore Quarry in the NCA in FY 2013.

Budget

The total FY 2013 budget for the MCNCA was $590,744, the 1711 base was $442,140, the 1711 one-time funding was $48,165, and other funding amounted to $100,439.

Land or easement acquisitions

There were no land or easement acquisitions in McInnis Canyons NCA in FY 2013.

Livestock Grazing

Environmental assessment

An environmental assessment was completed in 2013 to renew the grazing permit on the Crow Bottom Allotment, which is on the north side of the Colorado River, eight miles west of Fruita, CO. This cattle allotment consists of 3,735 public acres and 230 private acres. In FY 2103, issues with land and resource health and use conflicts prompted the BLM to change the season of use for this allotment from 01/16–04/30 to 02/01–04/01 and reduce the AUMs* from 193 to 160.

*An AUM (animal unit month) is the amount of forage necessary for sustaining one cow for a period of 1 month.

Other accomplishments

In FY 2013, MCNCA grazing staff inspected 11 grazing allotments for compliance, issued nine grazing bills, and monitored three grazing allotments.

Law enforcement

In FY 2013, MCNCA law enforcement staff resolved nine emergency incidents (search and rescues), investigated and cleared 54 non-drug-related cases, and handled 64 incidents while on patrol.

4 Resources, Values, and Risk Factors

Natural and cultural resources, including biological and environmental values

Natural and cultural resources are among the purposes of the McInnis Canyons NCA that are listed in its enabling legislation, and the NCA enjoys an extraordinary abundance of these resources, including an array of rare and common plant and animal species as well as prehistoric and historic sites and artifacts.

The BLM is committed to conserving, protecting and restoring the unique values of the NCA and furthering the goals of the BLM's National Conservation Lands, of which the NCA is a part. The NCA's natural and cultural resource management staff focuses on clearly communicating the importance of conserving and protecting NCA values and expanding the BLM's understanding of NCA resources though assessment, inventory and monitoring.

Summary of accomplishments

In FY 2013, MCNCA natural resource staff completed one land health evaluation and monitored 60,500 acres of terrestrial habitat. Cultural resource staff inventoried 123 acres of heritage resources, monitored four heritage resources, and conducted two tribal consultations.

Status of natural and cultural resources

Table 4.1. MCNCA natural and cultural resources - estimated status and trends, FY 2013

Resource or value	Status	Trend	Basis of estimate
Cultural (includes archaeological and historical)	Good	Stable	Program area staff estimate
Natural	Good	Stable	Land health assessments
Biological	Good	Stable	Program area staff estimate
Environmental	Good	Stable	Land health assessments

Table 4.2. Estimated percentage of MCNCA inventoried for natural and cultural resources, FY 2013

Resource or value	Estimated percentage of NCA inventoried for presence/absence	Basis of estimate
Cultural (includes archaeological and historical)	16.9%	Class I cultural resource inventory
Natural	100%	2003 land health assessment
Biological	100%	2003 land health assessment
Environmental	100%	2003 land health assessment

Risk factors for natural and cultural resources

Stresses on natural and cultural resources and values include (human-caused) wildland fire, invasive plants, recreational use, livestock grazing, domestic livestock diseases, loss of habitat, right-of-way proximity, air pollution, non-native animals, recreational target shooting, water pollution, theft, surface disturbance, vandalism, and increased access. See Table 4.11 for more information.

Water, soil, and air resources, including natural and environmental values

Nineteen miles of the Colorado River flow through the McInnis Canyons NCA, and all the canyons have seasonal flows resulting from snowmelt and summer rainstorms. These aquatic resources are important to fish and wildlife, and the river is popular with visitors for boating and camping. BLM staff members in this program area work to expand understanding of these resources though assessment, inventory and monitoring.

Status of water, soil, and air resources

Table 4.3. MCNCA water, soil, and air resources - estimated status and trends, FY 2013

Resource or value	Status	Trend	Basis of estimate
Water resources	Good overall	Stable or improving	Program area staff estimate
Soil resources	Good overall	Stable or declining	Program area staff estimate
Air resources	Good	Stable	Program area staff estimate

Table 4.4. Estimated percentage of MCNCA inventoried for water, soil, and air resources, FY 2013

Resource or value	Estimated percentage of NCA inventoried for presence/absence	Basis of estimate
Water resources	100%	Program area staff estimate
Soil resources	100%	Program area staff estimate
Air resources	100%	Program area staff estimate

Risk factors for water, soil, and air resources

Water resources may be threatened by invasive aquatic plants, recreational use, livestock grazing, and air and water pollution. See Table 4.11 for more information.

Recreational resources, including wilderness and scenic values

Recreation is listed as one of the purposes of the NCA in its enabling legislation, and visitors to the NCA can participate in an exceptionally wide variety of recreational activities, including world-class mountain biking, river rafting, hiking, camping, hunting, horseback riding, off-highway vehicle (OHV) travel and wildlife viewing. Visitors can also enjoy a broad range of recreational settings, including remote wilderness, riparian wetlands and culturally or historically significant sites. The 142-mile Kokopelli Trail runs though the NCA to Moab, Utah, and the Colorado River winds its way for 19 miles through the spectacular canyon country of the NCA.

The BLM's recreation staff assists in planning for and managing recreational resources and facilities in a manner that conserves National Conservation Lands and NCA values. Thus, roads and other facilities are built only when necessary for public health and safety, for exercise of existing rights, to minimize impacts to resources, or to otherwise further the purposes for which the NCA was designated. Recreation staff members actively engage stakeholders through the land-use planning process to help identify existing and potential uses that are compatible with the legislated purposes of the NCA, and the BLM practices a community-based approach to providing recreational services that is consistent with the purposes of the NCA and the socioeconomic goals of adjacent or nearby communities.

Summary of accomplishments

In FY 2013, the MCNCA recreation program staff managed the expanded Ruby-Horsethief recreation fee program, monitored 75 miles of rivers and trails, monitored 75,000 acres of recreation areas, and issued or monitored two special recreation permits.

Status of recreational resources

Table 4.5. MCNCA recreational resources and values - estimated status and trends, FY 2013

Resource or value	Status	Trend	Basis of estimate
Recreational	Good	Stable	Program area staff estimate
Wilderness	Good	Stable	Program area staff estimate
Scenic	Good	Stable	Program area staff estimate

Table 4.6. Estimated percentage of MCNCA inventoried for recreational resources, FY 2013

Resource or value	Estimated percentage of NCA inventoried for presence/absence	Basis of estimate
Recreational	100%	RMP completed
Wilderness	100%	RMP completed
Scenic	100%	RMP completed

Risk factors for recreational resources

Recreational resources and values may be adversely affected by any of the stressors that affect natural and cultural resources, because recreational visitors to the NCA often go there expecting (for example) to see pristine habitat, healthy wildlife, or undamaged rock art. Recreational use itself can damage recreational resources, especially with increased use due to local and regional population growth. Right-of-way proximity and air pollution may also threaten the integrity of the recreational experience. See Table 4.11 for more information.

Scientific, geological, and paleontological resources

The scientific resources of the McInnis Canyons NCA are cited in its enabling legislation as one of the purposes for its designation, as are the geological, cultural, paleontological, biological and wildlife resources, all of which are suitable for scientific study and abundant in the NCA. Scientific study of these resources benefits the scientific community as a whole and effectively informs the BLM's management of the NCA. The NCA staff works to identify research needs, encourage science partnerships and citizen science, and incorporate scientific results into management, decision-making, and outreach.

BLM staff members promote the NCA to universities and research institutions as an outdoor research and educational laboratory and potential demonstration center for emerging technology and innovative management practices. In turn, academic institutions, aware of the unique and valuable resources in the NCA, seek out partnerships with the BLM to conduct scientific research and education in the NCA.

Summary of accomplishments

The BLM geology-paleontology staff completed three days of surveying in the MCNCA in FY 2013. No new sites were found.

Status of scientific, geological, and paleontological resources

Table 4.7. Scientific, geological and paleontological resources - estimated status and trends, FY 2013

Resource or value	Status	Trend	Basis of estimate
Scientific	Good	Stable	Program area staff estimate
Geological (Precambrian to Quaternary rocks)	Good	Stable	Program area staff estimate
Paleontological (Scientifically important vertebrate fossils)	Good overall	Some vandalism, but stable overall, with more fossils being found and excavated at Mygatt-Moore Quarry every year.	Program area staff estimate

Table 4.8. Estimated percentage of MCNCA inventoried for scientific, geological and paleontological resources, FY 2013

Resource or value	Estimated percentage of NCA inventoried for presence/absence	Basis of estimate
Scientific	100%	RMP completed. Science plan completed.
Geological	100%	Program area staff estimate
Paleontological	75% (100 acres intensively inventoried - five sites monitored)	Program area staff estimate

Risk factors for scientific, geological, and paleontological resources

Scientific resources are affected by anything that affects geological, cultural, paleontological, biological, or wildlife resources. Geological and paleontological resources are primarily affected by theft and vandalism. See Table 4.11 for more information.

Wildlife education

Wildlife education is one of the purposes of the NCA listed in its enabling legislation, and the BLM strives to provide young people with opportunities to engage in recreation and practice stewardship on NCA lands and to learn about NCA resources and land management. BLM staff members seek out partnerships with local schools and educators to help them interpret National Conservation Lands and NCA values, and the BLM provides interpretive and educational materials to NCA users through the Grand Junction Field Office and the NCA website.

Fourth annual scavenger hunt

The BLM and the the Colorado Canyons Association co-hosted the fourth annual scavenger hunt in the NCA in May 2013. See "Education, outreach, and interpretation" on page 6 for more information.

Status of resources

Table 4.9. MCNCA educational resources - status and trends, FY 2013

Resource or value	Status	Trend	Basis of estimate
Wildlife education	Good	Stable	Program area staff estimate

Table 4.10. Percentage of MCNCA inventoried for wildlife educational resources, FY 2013

Resource or value	Estimated percentage of NCA inventoried for presence/absence	Basis of estimate
Wildlife education	100%	RMP completed. Program area staff estimate that 20% of the NCA has been inventoried for wildlife overall, and 100% has been inventoried for desert bighorn sheep.

Risk factors for wildlife education

Risk factors for wildlife (and thus wildlife education) include loss of habitat, right-of-way proximity, non-native animals, and increased access. See Table 4.11 for more information.

Table 4.11. Risk factors for MCNCA resources and values

Name of stressor	Description
Wild land fire	Introduced (human-caused) fires may destroy sensitive vegetation and BLM facilities.
Invasive plants	Noxious weeds and other non-native plants may displace native plants and affect the wildlife that depend on them. Invasive plants may also leave soils more vulnerable to erosion, as they (invasive species) typically lack the agents necessary to stabilize soils. Increased erosion may cause sedimentation rates of area streams to increase, reducing water quality.
Recreational use	Users may trample sensitive vegetation and deface or otherwise injure rock art. OHV use or foot travel may place stress upon wildlife, create pollution, and introduce invasives. Recreational use may also alter natural hydrologic function and water quality within affected watersheds by modifying drainage patterns (e.g., roads or social trails may intercept runoff), causing excessive erosion and sedimentation.
Livestock grazing	Livestock grazing may cause soil compaction, introduction of invasive species, and trampling of sensitive vegetation and riparian resources. Grazing may increase erosion potential by reducing plant cover and litter accumulation necessary to protect soils from erosional processes. Grazing may also reduce water quality by increasing erosion and sedimentation of area waters.
Domestic livestock diseases	Domestic animals can transmit diseases to wildlife (e.g., domestic sheep can transmit pneumonia to desert bighorn sheep).
Loss of habitat	May occur as a result of soil compaction or introduction of invasive species due to motorized travel (ORVs), livestock grazing, and off-trail travel. May occur after excavation for construction or (e.g.) paleontological research. May result from pollution of rivers and streams. Wildlife may be displaced because of human or animal presence.
Proximity of rights of way or other development	May introduce invasive vegetation and decrease scenic value.
Air pollution	Emissions from nearby highways or OHVs could affect visitors, wildlife, and scenic values. Dust and deposition could adversely affect soil health, water chemistry, or visitor experience.
Non-native animals	For example, non-native fish can crowd out native fish from the NCA's streams and rivers.
Water pollution	May adversely affect fish and other wildlife.
Theft	Unlawful removal of fossil remains and artifacts.
Soil surface disturbance	Due to construction, excavation, or ORV travel (see Loss of habitat).
Vandalism	Defacement of rock art or other cultural resources; wanton destruction of sensitive vegetation; harassment of wildlife.
Increased access	Can cause destruction of sensitive cultural and biological resources.

5 Science

Projects

Black Ridge bighorn sheep study

Colorado State University (CSU) continued its study of desert bighorn sheep in the Black Ridge Canyons Wilderness in the MCNCA. This project began in January 2012, when transects were placed in the Wilderness to determine the differences in habitat characteristics between frequented and less frequented areas used by desert bighorn sheep. One goal for this study is to compare how bighorn sheep respond to habitat in burned and unburned areas. The study is scheduled for completion in 2014.

Genetics of Colorado hookless cactus

In FY 2013, the University of Northern Colorado and the Denver Botanic Gardens, in partnership with the BLM, continued examining the genetic status, diversity, variability, hybridization, and response to stressors of Colorado hookless cactus populations in Devil's Canyon and Rabbit Valley. This research aims to better understand the evolutionary status of this federally listed species and will also assist managers in developing more effective ways of identifying this sometimes puzzling plant (despite the name, Colorado hookless cactus may occasionally have hooked spines).

Other ongoing scientific projects in the MCNCA:

- Long term effects of wildfire on desert bighorn habitat
- Determining the origins of the Mygatt-Moore Dinosaur Quarry deposit and its fauna
- National rivers and streams assessment
- Gunnison sage-grouse Pinyon Mesa population models
- Using remote sensing to detect cheatgrass and other early season invasives in the Colorado National Monument and MCNCA
- Plant inventory of MCNCA
- A survey of the species composition and distribution of byrophilous tardigrades in the high desert.

Status of science plan

A revised science plan for MCNCA was completed in 2012.

6 Planning and NEPA

Status of RMP

Planning in the McInnis Canyons NCA is guided by the 2004 McInnis Canyons management plan, which was developed through a collaborative public process, as directed by the NCA's enabling legislation.

Status of activity plans

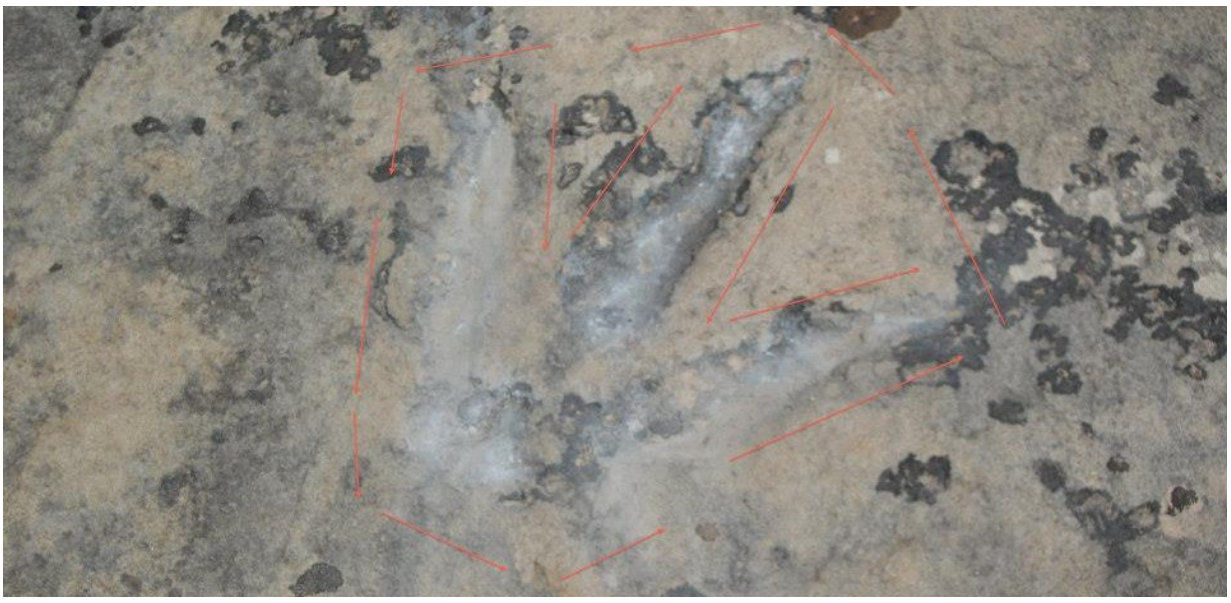
Ruby-Horsethief management plan

The management plan for the Ruby-Horsethief section of the Colorado River in McInnis Canyons NCA was approved in 2011. The BLM implemented the permit system in the 2012 season (May 1 to September 30) and began charging fees in the 2013 season. This gradual approach allowed the BLM to make any needed adjustments to the program before the fee-based reservation system began.

FY 2013 NEPA actions and/or authorizations

Fossil excavations

In FY 2013, the BLM completed a determination of NEPA adequacy (DNA) to allow researchers to drill three bore holes near the Mygatt-Moore Quarry in the MCNCA to determine the lateral extent of fossil bone beds outside the quarry. The BLM also completed a categorical exclusion (CX) to allow excavation of a dinosaur fossil in the Fruita Paleontological Area.



7 Summary of Performance Measures

Table 7.1. McInnis Canyons NCA - estimated resource status and trends, FY 2013

Resource or value	Status	Trend	Basis of estimate
Cultural (includes archaeo-logical and historical)	Good	Stable	Program area staff estimate
Natural	Good	Stable	Land health assessments
Biological	Good	Stable	Program area staff estimate
Environmental	Good	Stable	Land health assessments
Water resources	Good overall	Stable or improving	Program area staff estimate
Soil resources	Good overall	Stable or declining	Program area staff estimate
Air resources	Good	Stable	Program area staff estimate
Recreational	Good	Stable	Program area staff estimate
Wilderness	Good	Stable	Program area staff estimate
Scenic	Good	Stable	Program area staff estimate
Scientific	Good	Stable	Program area staff estimate
Geological (Precambrian to Quaternary rocks)	Good	Stable	Program area staff estimate
Paleontological (Scientifically important vertebrate fossils)	Good overall	Some vandalism, but stable overall, with more fossils being found and excavated at Mygatt-Moore Quarry every year.	Program area staff estimate
Wildlife education	Good	Stable	Program area staff estimate

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